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ABSTRACT

Despite increases in the minimum legal drinking age, national studies show that 82 to 92 percent of college students consume alcohol, with about 20 percent considered as heavy drinkers. Students who drink may have particular needs for focused education or intervention, but all students can benefit from education regarding the full range of alcohol usage. Alcohol education on campuses should target the entire college community, including faculty and staff; many opportunities exist for educating the university community about alcohol-related risk reduction. An initial step in alcohol education is to establish a task force or committee which will assess the needs of the target population and explore areas such as funding sources, staffing, and goals. Also important is an institutional policy on alcohol use. Once campus needs have been determined, the scope of the program can be set. The program's leadership will assume responsibility for initial and ongoing program development and quality control, and will generate and maintain the momentum of the program. Peer education is strongly recommended in leadership programs and careful recruitment and education of these peer leaders is crucial. A well-planned, comprehensive, and enduring alcohol education program holds the potential to reduce alcohol-related problems on an individual as well as an institutional basis. (RJM)

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FACTS ON COLLEGE ALCOHOL EDUCATION PROGRAMMING

by Donna S. Hill

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New Jersey Alcohol / Drug

RESOURCE CENTER AND CLEARINGHOUSE

Center of Alcohol Studies, Rutgers University

FACTS ON COLLEGE ALCOHOL EDUCATION PROGRAMMING

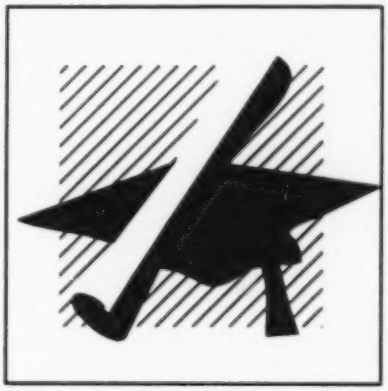
Donna S. Hill, M.S.

Alcohol consumption has traditionally been part of campus life for many students. It continues to be the drug of choice on college campuses and is the most used and abused drug in this country.

Despite increases in the minimum legal drinking age, national studies still show that most college students (approximately 82% - 92%) drink alcoholic beverages, and a significant number (about 20%) are considered heavy drinkers. Students who drink may have particular needs for focused education or intervention concerning their drinking. However, all students can benefit from appropriate education regarding the full range of potential alcohol consumption behaviors: non-use, use, abuse, and dependency. A comprehensive, ongoing educational program can provide the opportunity for such education to occur during college years as well as later in life.

Alcohol education programming for a campus setting should be concerned not only with the student body, but the rest of the college community: faculty, staff, administration and surrounding environment. Information regarding alcohol can be personally valuable to members of each group, and an additional benefit is achieved when the messages from student-oriented activities are reinforced and validated by others with whom the students interact.

Opportunities are plentiful for educating the university community about risk reduction related to alcohol use and recognition of existing or impending problems related to alcohol abuse, as well as awareness of resources for information and assistance. The organizations within a campus setting can provide staff, motivation, expertise, familiarity with specific campus issues and support for alcohol education programming. Such groups can include: residence life programs, health and wellness programs, student health services, counseling services, student government, faculty and staff organizations, student clubs and organizations, fraternity and sorority systems, Student Affairs office, Campus Security office, Student Activities office, etc.



The planning activities during the preliminary preparation stages help to determine the focus, approach and purpose(s) of the program. Adequate attention during this stage contributes greatly to the smooth and successful implementation of a campus-based alcohol education program.

An initial step is to establish a task force or committee which will be responsible for determining the needs of the target population, possible sources of funding, staffing and other resources, setting goals, establishing priorities, and determining the scope and comprehensiveness of the planned program. This task force should include broad representation from the various groups within a college community – students, faculty, administrators, and staff members associated directly or indirectly with alcohol-related issues to ensure that the institution's philosophy and orientation are appropriately defined and integrated into the program.

The institution's alcohol policy is critical to the success of education or intervention programs. The policy sets the foundation for environmental, programmatic and disciplinary approaches to the many alcohol-related issues facing a campus community. In recent years, attention has focused on policy development and review, which has resulted in resources to help institutions analyze current policies.

Once the needs of the target audiences have been determined, goals established, and resources such as personnel/staffing, financial support, equipment and materials, and facilities to conduct activities and house the program have been assessed, the scope of the program can be determined. Additional questions which may help in determining the comprehensiveness of the program design include short- and long-term objectives, the means of measuring whether objectives have been met, and the time frame within which the program is to be established and evaluated. Ongoing evaluation is important to the maintenance of quality programming and can help to justify its continuation. The answers to these questions and others pertinent to the particular institution will begin to shape the program.

Program leadership will assume responsibility for initial and ongoing

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program development and quality control, and will generate and maintain the momentum of program efforts. The leadership may be an individual or a small, cohesive group offering a combination of qualifications such as knowledge of educational theory, familiarity with alcohol issues and the campus environment, experience and skills focused in program development and evaluation, marketing, materials development, teaching, group process, and counseling. The person(s) filling this role will be the central source of information about the program, provide the mechanism for review and approval of program content, activities, publicity and promotion, and be the motivating force for program efforts.

The peer education approach is a strongly recommended aspect of this type program. Careful recruitment and selection of peer educators, coupled with adequate training and supervision, contribute to quality programming. It is important that all peer educators know factual information and are able to field questions with confidence. They should also provide the opportunity for audiences to analyze their own responses, behaviors and attitudes about the subject, and must recognize their own limitations when dealing with participants' questions or personal concerns. Therefore, it is important that training include referral techniques, campus and community referral resources and interpersonal skills to help individuals when it is appropriate. Incentives for retaining successful peer educators are vital to promote program continuity.

With respect to program content, there are several factors to consider. The goals established by the task force should provide a broad base on which to plan the initial content. Program efforts should focus on timely issues with particular relevance to students' lives. This helps to generate student interest, maintain program credibility, and convey the type of information most likely to be applied to the campus environment and lifestyle. Cycles of activity during the academic year should be identified to maximize the effectiveness of program efforts and respond most appropriately to the community's needs. Consideration of exam schedules and competing campus activities as well as seasonal events that may blend into educational programming can lead to greater return for programming efforts. The program also needs targeted and on-going publicity to help ensure their success. Promotional materials, whether they are informational articles, flyers, posters or verbal announcements, should be accurate, and attractive to the their audience. Involving representatives of actual target groups with the development of promotional material helps make it relevant, and appealing.

A well-planned, comprehensive and enduring alcohol education program has the potential to reduce alcohol-related problems on an individual as well as institutional basis. The prevention or minimization of alcohol - related problems can also have a far-reaching impact long after students graduate.

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